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CRITICISMS AND DISCUSSIONS.

DR. OSTWALD'S PAMPHLET ON UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE.

WE are in receipt of a pamphlet written by Dr. W. Ostwald, entitled *Die Weltsprache*, published by the committee for the introduction of an international auxiliary language.

Dr. Ostwald is an enthusiastic adherent of the idea and the following passage in which he discusses and rejects the advisability of making English the world-language is an extract from his pamphlet:

"Having granted the desirability of a world-language, the question arises as to its possibility. The answer is: 'It is possible, for in America, everyone, whatever his vernacular may be, speaks English, for English is the language of business and all other intercourse of that immense country.'

"Some one to whom I mentioned my argument answered, 'Very well, let us use English as an international auxiliary language,' and indeed this proposition pops up again and again, and has been frequently considered. A prominent German professor has upon a solemn occasion made this suggestion to me and has recommended it, but I am convinced of it that it is impracticable.

"Suppose that in Germany a majority of thoughtful people would be—let us directly say so—unselfish enough to choose English as the international language, we would find much opposition among the nations with a more decided national sentiment who would not be willing to make so great a sacrifice. Accordingly, there is no prospect of establishing a world-language by choosing one of the living tongues, and an attempt to endorse one of them would therefore from the start be destined to become a failure.

"First, there are national objections which have to be considered, but in addition great practical interests are at stake. The nation whose language would be raised to the prominence of a world-

language, would through this circumstance alone acquire an enormous technical advantage before other nations, because its books and its newspapers would be read everywhere. Its news, its catalogues, its advertisements would be understood everywhere, and so no other nation which had not as yet utterly lost its instinct of self-preservation could wittingly accede to such a measure.

"Together with its language will also be transferred the world conception, the views of art and science of the favored nation, and if instead of a new artificial auxiliary language, we would accept one of the living tongues, we would not be able to protect our own mother-speech against unfair influences and infringements so as to neglect it and to prepare for its final disappearance.

"Although gladly recognising the contributions which the people that read and write English have made to the general civilisation and *belles lettres* of humanity, I must emphatically insist that an exclusively English influence in science and art would for the entire development of the human race be as decidedly undesirable as would be a preponderance of the English political and commercial system over the rest of the world, and even if we would replace the word 'English' by 'American,' the main point of our verdict would thereby certainly not be altered. These are irresistible reasons, which, as everyone will grant, will dispose once for all of the choice of any one of the living languages."

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Professor Ostwald's reasons why English should not become the world-language, are purely negative and based mainly upon personal or rather national prejudice: they will appeal most powerfully to all those who cherish a dislike of the English nation. It is true that the English are much hated on the continent, in France as well as in Germany, and the animosity against the whole English-speaking race has been much increased since the Boer war, but it seems to us that the objections which Professor Ostwald raises are all on the surface and have nothing to do with the real question. If any of the living languages is to become the world-language the question will not be decided by a vote of the nations but the actual outcome, in which sympathies and antipathies may play an important part. but are by no means the decisive factors.

In pleading for a universal language Professor Ostwald sets into full light the drawbacks of the living languages, instanced in his own dear German mother-tongue. He shows how it contains many endings and determinatives which are redundant. First, the gender is redundant; secondly, the declension of adjectives is quite

unnecessary, and thirdly, the repeated indication of the plural form in one and the same sentence is not needed, etc. The German sentence "*Die steinernen Häuser brennen nicht*," consists of nine syllables and contains all these redundant determinations. Professor Ostwald declares that if the redundant determinations were omitted the sense would be just as clear, and shaved of them the sentence might read as follows: "*De steinern Häuser brenn nicht*." This is a saving of two syllables and would render the language considerably easier. Professor Ostwald forgets that the development of English consists exactly in the omission of these redundant forms. In his attempts of letting the German approach the ideal of a universal language, he saves only two syllables. Why does he object to the English which expresses the same sense in five syllables, "Stone-houses don't burn"?

The objections which Professor Ostwald offers against English are irrelevant, and, judging from his own characterisation of what a universal language ought to be, it seems rather inconsistent that he is not an advocate of English as the best medium of international communication, especially as English is a language based upon his own German vernacular. English is but Saxon universalised.

There are objections that can be made to English as an international language, but they lie in another field than sentimental considerations of jealousy. The most important ones are the English spelling and certain awkward methods of English pronunciation. For instance, the English do not pronounce the initial "p" before "s", and thus no German or Frenchman would recognise the words "psalms" or "psychology" when they are pronounced in the English way, unless they are specially prepared for it. The same is true of the "k" and "g" before "n" as in "knight," "gnome," etc.

But the English spelling is worse than the pronunciation and the fact is so generally conceded that we need not enter into details. It is an old *crux* from which English grammarians and teachers suffer greatly, and reforms are being attempted constantly but mostly in vain. We will not decide the question here, but will only say that if English is to become the world-language, it will have to make several important concessions and undergo some changes in its methods of spelling and pronunciation.

If any living language is to become the international world-speech, (and I grant that if there is any one that has a chance to fill that office, it will be the English,) the decision will not be made by a vote of delegates of international committees but by the force of facts. If English should continue to increase as it does now, it will

be found to be the most practical means of international communication. Business will more and more be transacted in English and news will find quickest circulation if divulged in English.

In the beginning of the history of every nation we find several dialects spoken, but, by and by, one of the dialects becomes the common speech of all literary and educated people. This is not done by a vote taken by the representatives of the nation, but is simply due to a survival of the fittest. In Greece, Athens was the most active city among the Greek states. Its Ionic dialect was modified by contact with other Greek tribes, and thus the speech of Attica became the classical language of ancient Hellas. It is quite probable that the international language of the future will develop in the same way. That language will be spoken most which best fulfills the main conditions that are needed for this special purpose, and so far as we can see, of all the languages English is the fittest.

The teeming millions of India speak a number of languages, and a man from the South would not understand a man from the Northern country, such as Burma or Nepal. The result is, they have to use a language that is easily acquired and easily understood everywhere. English is spoken in India only by a few hundred thousand foreign, (and let us grant it, even hated,) invaders, and yet the English language fulfills the conditions, and we need not doubt that within a hundred years the language of the country will be English.

Suppose we have in a foreign, not an English, country, families of several nationalities dwelling together,—say for instance in Jerusalem or in Peking. There the children of French, of German, of English, of Spanish, of Portugese, of Italian, and also of Russian families who happen to live there for some reason or other, play together. What will be the language of the children? There will be scarcely any doubt that anywhere in the world, be it China or Asiatic Turkey, that English will be the common speech of such international gatherings. In fact, wherever we inquire, English does become the language that is understood by everyone, not because English is the most beloved of all nationalities, but because it is the easiest language, and even if it is not well spoken, it is easily understood.

English is least hampered by redundant determinatives, its grammar is very simple, and so the language is acquired almost without effort. It is true that the use of correct literary English in which all scholarly linguistical and elocutionary requirements are observed is almost as difficult as the acquisition of other languages, but that is another question which has nothing to do with the fact

that English lends itself best to the purpose of international communication.

We do not venture to decide here the question whether or not English will actually become the international language. We only point out that Professor Ostwald's arguments that militate against it, induce us to think that English among all the living languages has the best chance, yet we would grant that in case English should become the international language, there is no doubt that it would have to make certain concessions, especially in spelling and pronunciation, and these modifications would to some extent change the English language into a new language which we might call world-English.

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Professor Ostwald objects to the introduction of English as a world-language because together with the language, we would come into possession of the entire world-conception, including the views of art and science that have been deposited in English speech. We would say, that far from being a disadvantage, this is a preference for the English, and, closely considered, the English literature and the English sciences are not national but international. How much of the German and French literature, science, and arts has been incorporated and is still being incorporated into the English language! In fact English, especially since the rise of the United States, has become the receptacle of human, of international thought, and there is nowhere in the world a proposition of importance uttered in any language but it is at once translated into English and becomes accessible to the English-speaking world.

English is not the speech of Great Britain alone, but of North America, Africa, Australia, India, the European colonies of China, and so it has actually ceased to be the exclusive speech of the English people and has become an international medium. It is the only language that is being spoken by many nations of decidedly different nationalities.

In the course of its evolution English accepted so many foreign elements, especially here in America, that it is frequently denied to have a character of its own. The legend is well known that God made all the other languages but that Satan made English and he made it by mixing up all the God-created languages and calling the result "English." The legend has been told by Heine who is well known from his antagonism to English, but though it is sarcastic it expresses very well the international character of English speech.

If English itself has an international character, English literature and English science are even more international, and rather than construct an empty receptacle for thought, it would be by far preferable to inherit with the acceptance of a world-speech the wealth of intellectual life of several great nations, whose fate is strongly identified with humanitarian and international ideals. An artificial language would be not less difficult to learn but would be empty and, being an utter blank, would oblige us to start the world of thought all over again.

We must not forget that language is *φύσει*, not *θέσει*. It is of natural growth and does not originate by social contract. It seems to us that if the development of the national languages has been such in the past, why should not the development of an international language be the same means?

The intellectual institutions of mankind are not less products of nature than is the physiological development of animals and plants. To some extent we can direct the natural course of life, but in its main outlines the spiritual development of the world, of political, of legal, of educational, and of all other institutions, is as much a result of natural growth as the structure of the human body or the shape of trees or the formation of crystals. If the word could be understood in the scientific sense as we define it, we would say briefly that finally not man will shape the international language, but God.

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At the present juncture, it seems of little consequence whether or not, in the distant future, English or a modified world-English, or an artificial auxiliary language, shall become the universal means of communication. We have to deal with conditions such as they are now, but I would insist that *the aspiration of constructing a world-language is in itself a factor that should not be underrated as a symptom of the growing spirit of international good will and friendship*. International exhibitions have been held in London, Paris, Chicago, etc., and foreign delegates have been welcomed in these centres of different nationality. We have the Hague tribunal which, though it will not prevent wars, will gradually tend to establish an international conscience, and the development of an international conscience will be an important factor in making for peace. Among the symptoms of international good will the aspiration of creating an international language is one that we deem of highest importance even if its actual aim may be destined to be a failure.